



DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

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WATT UNVEILS PROGRAM TO PROTECT ENDANGERED HUMPBACK WHALE

GLACIER BAY, AK.--Secretary of the Interior James Watt today reaffirmed the Administration's commitment to the survival of whale populations and unveiled a plan to provide greater protection to the endangered humpback whales in their summering ground in Glacier Bay. The Interior Department's actions were announced after a day-long tour of the Glacier Bay National Park and Preserve with noted zoologist Roger Payne.

Secretary Watt announced initiatives to:

- ° Expedite completion of a revised general management plan for Glacier Bay National Park. Federal law requires development of such plans for all new or enlarged Alaska park areas by December 2, 1985. The revised plan for Glacier Bay, which will place particular emphasis on protection and preservation of the humpback will now be completed by 1983.
- ° Enact National Park Service (NPS) rules which limit small vessel entry into the Bay to complement existing regulations which limit cruise ship entry and prohibit commercial harvesting of organisms on which the humpbacks feed. The small vessel rules, which have been delayed several times, will be effective September 1, 1981.

Glacier Bay is the summering ground for the endangered humpback whales. Recently, however, the number of whales using the Bay has declined. Watt said, "We don't know the reasons for this decline, but the theories are that boat noise and a decline in feed may have caused the whales to move. The Interior Department has funded studies to determine whether human activities have adversely affected the whales.

"A final decision cannot be made until completion of an ongoing study, scheduled for 1983. Our objective in making these rules effective is to freeze in place the historic levels of activity in the Bay to provide the consistency necessary to complete credible whale studies.

"I want to stress that we will be flexible. If the studies do not support the rules in their current form, we will change the rules. But until we know what threatens these marvelous marine mammals, I want to ensure that further harm does not come to them."

(more)

The actions announced today will complement efforts underway at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration to establish a marine sanctuary to protect the humpback's calving grounds off Hawaii. Recent evidence shows that remnant humpback populations in the Pacific migrate from calving grounds off Hawaii to summer feeding grounds in Glacier Bay.

The humpback whale is one of the most severely depleted great whale species. They inhabit coastal waters around the world and have been hunted extensively by many countries. Humpbacks reach a length of 50 feet and can weigh as much as 50 tons. They are famous for the beautiful underwater "songs" they use as a means of communicating with each other.

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